

support they need, particularly at a time when States are facing budgetary crises and struggling to deal with skyrocketing costs associated with providing health care.

I understand that tough financial decisions have to be made in order keep this country's fiscal house in order, but I do not believe it is fair that we require our seniors, our children, and the disabled to shoulder this burden. It is simply unacceptable to impose arbitrary cuts for a program that does so much to support families in need. I believe we can find appropriate savings in Medicaid without jeopardizing the health care of so many Americans, and this body has supported measures to do that in the past. For example, I supported a bill to charge the Institutes of Medicine with evaluating Medicaid to find appropriate cost savings and improve efficiency within the program. But the proposals many Members of the House of Representatives are promoting in their version of this legislation completely fail to consider the implications for the health and well-being of Medicaid recipients. Rather, these cuts would have more to do with paying for tax cuts targeted to benefit the wealthiest Americans.

I believe Senator GRASSLEY and some members of the Finance Committee tried hard to soften the blow of the cuts required by the budget resolution, but I recognize that a much worse bill will likely emerge from the conference committee with the House of Representatives, and we will likely regret starting down this slope toward drastic cuts to an essential part of our Nation's health care system.

I have heard from many organizations and constituents who have expressed their concerns. Dana Plunkett and Angela Romney have both sent letter expressing their concerns for their children. Both of these mothers' children participate in the Easter Seals program which relies heavily on Medicaid. Dana's son Larry is able to live in an independent living facility because of Medicaid. Angela's daughter Maya who has Down's syndrome has been able to receive vital therapies to allow her to interact in a classroom setting and live more independently.

I am aware of the challenges many families, health care providers, States, and private payers for health care face under our burdened health care system. I appeal to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to find a solution to adequately fund Medicaid and avoid gutting the program during conference negotiations.

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, this week, the Senate is undertaking a significant effort to reduce Federal spending and return fiscal responsibility to the Congress. Not since 1997 has Congress attempted a budget reconciliation bill. But the fiscal situation facing the American people today demands a serious commitment from the Federal Government to reduce deficit spending. This reconciliation package is an important part of that process.

I recommend the chairman of the Budget Committee for his efforts on reconciliation. He has been an outstanding advocate for fiscal restraint, while trying to respond fairly to the competing demands for increased spending. While I do have some concerns about certain cuts included in this bill, on the whole I think it is a balanced package that accomplishes meaningful restraints on Government spending.

One of the positives of this bill is the provisions relating to energy production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. It is time to open ANWR for oil production to increase our domestic supply of petroleum. We need to look no further than the gas pump to see what happens when U.S. oil production lulls. High gas prices hurt Montanans and dependence on foreign oil hurts our national security.

The Energy Information Administration states that the coastal plain region harboring the 1.5 million-acre 1002 Area is "the largest unexplored, potential productive onshore basin in the United States." Studies by the U.S. Geological Survey, USGS, estimate that drilling in ANWR could yield up to 16 billion barrels of oil—an amount roughly equal to 30 years of oil imports from Saudi Arabia.

Most people don't understand that the 1002 Area is only 1.5 million acres within the 19 million acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This budget allows for development of only 2000 of those 19 million acres in ANWR. That means 99.99 percent of ANWR will be untouched. If this tragedy-filled hurricane season has taught us anything, we should realize that by concentrating our production and refinery capability in the Gulf of Mexico, we are risking supply disruption.

We need to do more offshore, and more onshore across this country. Last week, I held a hearing on onshore oil and gas development. The backlog we face in processing permits for reasonable onshore production contributes to the energy crisis we are facing now. All segments of the economy are directly impacted by the costs of fuel to produce and move our output. From keeping warm in our homes to moving food to the market, the American taxpayer faces a tighter budget as a result of skyrocketing energy costs. We simply must consider all options when it comes to increasing production, and ANWR are an important part of that.

The United States has some of the strictest environmental laws in the entire world. We can safely and carefully produce oil within our own shores, or we can ignore our responsibility to domestically produce this resource. Royalty revenues from oil production in ANWR is expected to produce \$2.5 billion for the Federal Government over the next 5 years alone, plus provide valuable jobs, and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

It is time for this body to do the right thing and increase our domestic

production of energy, and ANWR is a good place to start. So I applaud the work of the chairman of the Energy Committee for including ANWR in this budget.

I am also pleased with the provisions to address digital television transition. Setting a firm date of April 7, 2009, allows the FCC to make critical spectrum available for the emergency workers who protect our communities. Our first responders need access to this spectrum to ensure communications in times of national emergencies.

In a rural State like Montana, this spectrum can also be used to expand broadband access, linking rural communities not just for emergency needs, but for education, telehealth, and economic development.

The revenues generated by this spectrum auction generate billions toward paying down the national debt, but also give us the flexibility to address some other priorities, including essential air service. I was pleased to be able to include language in this bill that will provide an additional \$75 million for essential air.

Thirty-seven States rely on essential air, but skyrocketing fuel prices are placing that service in jeopardy. The provision I included will increase EAS funding over the next 5 years, and ensure that communities relying on essential air will continue to have transportation options.

Also important to Montana is ensuring that Federal incentives for higher education remain intact. Though significant cost savings have been achieved in the reconciliation package adopted by the Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, many positive changes have been made to benefit the students who most need assistance.

The higher education reforms save \$9.8 billion over 5 years, while still preserving critical benefits for students across the country. For first- and second-year college students, the loan limits will be increased to \$3,500 for the first year and \$4,500 for the second year. This is especially important in a State like Montana, which ranks third-from-last in retention of first-year college students who continue on to their second year.

Not only are we increasing the overall aid available, but are also emphasizing the various types of education needed from the current workforce. This bill provides for additional funding for grants for Pell-eligible students who major in math, science, technology, engineering, and some foreign languages. All too often, employers comment that they have skilled jobs available, but are unable to find the kind of specialization they need from students, and by providing incentives for students to study in these underutilized areas, they are able to obtain an affordable education and fill a much-needed place in the workforce.

I am especially proud of the provision in this bill which provides for